

Ever wish you had a fairy godmother to whip your life into shape? Natalie Pool found someone to do just that.



LAST NIGHT A PA saved my life

WHAT IS IT?

A personal concierge (or freelance personal assistant). We hired Ciska Thurman from My Life Organised (www.mylifeorganised.co.za).

WHAT DO THEY CLAIM?

From taking your pet to the vet to standing in the queue at Home Affairs – if it's legal, they'll do it.

WHAT DOES IT COST?

Anything from R185 to R350 an hour. There are also packages starting at R1 520 for eight hours.

WHO DID THE TRIAL?

Features editor Natalie Pool, who lives in a constant state of organised chaos.

I was never a particularly neat child and had regular impassioned debates (read: screaming matches) with my mother, who didn't share my opinion that it didn't matter what my room looked like, as long as the door was closed. And to be fair, it did often look like a bomb of CDs, clothes and half the kitchen sink exploded in there. Not even I was brave enough to look underneath the bed.

Since moving out, I've made a concerted effort to be tidier, but somehow my stuff always ends up as a heap on the floor. There's a bag of clothes labeled "What were you thinking?", a pile of old magazines, and junk mail that are in recycling purgatory, and two cardboard boxes that have been there since I moved into my flat over a year ago.

So when my editor suggests I try out a PA for a week, I jump at the chance. After a bit of research, I come across www.mylifeorganised.co.za,

described as "premier lifestyle management" promising to "stop at nothing". I arrange to meet with the Jo'burg head of operations, Ciska Thurman, one morning at work. Over the phone she tells me that she used to be a teacher and I conjure up an image of a severe, cardigan-wearing, bun-sporting woman with a retracting pointer and dark-rimmed spectacles.

Luckily she's none of these things, but rather a pretty, blonde woman with a gentle nature. She asks me what areas of my life need organising and I manage to narrow it down to my living room. We decide on a three-hour package, broken up into two 90-minute sessions of collaborating, sorting and chucking.

Ciska arrives at my humble abode promptly at 8h30 the following Wednesday morning and we sit down to discuss the problem areas and possible solutions. She then does a quick sweep of my living area, which includes a small dining and TV room, leaving no stone unturned. With no time to "um" or "ah", we tackle the disaster area and divide everything into piles – stuff to keep, stuff to recycle, stuff to throw out and stuff to give away.

The woman is like Mary Poppins – firm but friendly, not intimidating in the least yet somehow instilling a sense of direction in me. By the end of our session, the cardboard boxes are empty and Ciska leaves, taking all my unwanted and unneeded belongings with her, promising to deposit them at a charity, recycling dump and rubbish bin.

A week later we go shopping for a storage unit to avoid the "heap on the floor" syndrome and end up with a simple, affordable bookcase.

If it were up to me, the box containing the parts of my new purchase would live in a corner for weeks before I eventually convinced a boy to assemble it. But Ciska needs closure and whips out a tool kit from her bag, and before I know it, the two of us have out the unit together. On a roll, Ciska puts up some photo frames before making a graceful exit, leaving me to wonder if she was ever really here at all.

In the end, organising my life was all common sense. I just needed someone to get the ball rolling and keep me focused. In a fantasy world Ciska would never leave my side, but I guess that would be weird. *The end*



"And that concludes our basketball-finger-spinning lesson for today."

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